

Nixon Vow To Aid Laos Reaffirmed

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The Nixon administration has restated its pledge to protect Laos on the eve of a special closed Senate session to examine the extent of U.S. financial and military support to that Southeast Asian kingdom.

A State Department official outlined the administration's policy in a letter to Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. The letter said U.S. failure to prevent a North Vietnamese takeover of Laos would permit Hanoi to "divert thousands of their forces ... to the war against South Vietnam and greatly enhance their position" in border areas used for attacks on allied troops.

Kennedy (D-Mass.) charged yesterday that the letter "justifies new military ventures by the President anywhere in Southeast Asia" and that Mr. Nixon ~~already is conducting~~ an unauthorized war in northern Laos.

Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) also challenged the President's policy in Laos, saying the danger of U.S. involvement was "increasingly grave." He contended that U.S. aid now runs into the "hundreds of millions of dollars," in contrast to official estimates of about \$52 million for the current year.

Symington, chairman of a Senate armed services subcommittee, accused the administration of cloaking the extent of U.S. activity in "a mantle of secrecy" in possible violation of restrictions imposed last year on use of American troops in Laos and funding of foreign mercenary forces to defend Laos.

At today's rare closed session, Symington said, he will give the Senate the facts about U.S. bombing in northern Laos that is not intended to block the flow of supplies down the Ho Chi Minh trail into South Vietnam.

The letter to Kennedy was written by David M. Abshire, an assistant secretary of state for congressional relations. He said Mr. Nixon had asked him to reply to the senator's April 23 request for clarification of administration policy.

Abshire said there were two separate North Vietnamese military operations in Laos — one to move supplies into South Vietnam and a second, in northern Laos, aimed at undermining the Laotian government. The United States had an interest in opposing both efforts to protect American troops in Vietnam, he said.

Abshire argued that the President had authority "to protect our troops and to bring the hostilities which were under way when he took office to an end in a way that will contribute to a durable peace."

Two Senators Assail U.S. on Laos War

By JOHN W. FINNEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 6—Senator Stuart Symington said today that instead of the \$52-million publicly acknowledged by the Administration, the United States was spending "hundreds of millions of dollars" in a clandestine war in northern Laos.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, meanwhile, protested that the Administration was indulging in "contradictions" and "white-washes" on the American involvement in the war in northern Laos and advancing a logic for the involvement that "justifies new military adventures by the President anywhere in Southern Asia."

The Kennedy protest was prompted by a State Department contention that the President has constitutional authority to "take reasonable measures" in northern Laos as part of his program of withdrawing American forces from South Vietnam. The contention was made in response to a letter from Senator Kennedy that asked what authority the President had for United States military activities in northern Laos.

The dual attack on Administration policies in Laos came as the Senate prepared to hold tomorrow afternoon one of its infrequent closed sessions to review the extent of the American military involvement in Laos.

The session will be held at the request of Senator Symington, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Subcommittee on foreign commitments. The subcommittee has been investigating the generally unpublicized American military activities in northern Laos over the last two years.

During the session, the Missouri Democrat said, he plans to present a report showing that the United States is spending far more for military activities in Laos than as ever been publicly acknowledged by the Administration.

The only publicly announced cost of United States activities in Laos, he noted, has been \$52-million in economic aid this year.

"In fact, however," Senator Symington said, "the cost of United States-supported military operations runs the amount we are actually spending well into the hundreds of millions of dollars."

The Symington statement was based on a still-secret report prepared by two Symington subcommittee staff members — James G. Lowenstein and Richard M. Moose — who visited Laos in April. On the basis of that report, Senator Symington said, he would describe to the Senate "the increasing Chinese presence in Laos, such as B-52 bombing raids in northern Laos and the introduction of Thai troops into the Laotian war, 'with a mantle of secrecy.'"

Senator Kennedy made his statement in releasing an exchange of correspondence with the executive branch on the Administration's constitutional authority to engage in hostilities in northern Laos.

Mr. Kennedy's letter, addressed to Mr. Nixon, had been prompted by testimony in April by William H. Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for

East Asian and Pacific Affairs, before the Senate Judiciary committee on refugees. Mr. Sullivan said at one point that the war in northern Laos has "nothing to do with military operations in South Vietnam or Cambodia."

On the basis of that Sullivan statement, Senator Kennedy wrote to President Nixon inquiring as to "the precise authority for continuing United States military activities in northern Laos" in view of earlier Administration statements that American activities in Laos were related solely to the protection of American forces as they were withdrawn from Vietnam.

The reply, from David M. Abshire, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, said:

"The President's constitutional powers as Commander in Chief and in the field of foreign relations provide authority for him to take reasonable measures to carry out these withdrawals, to protect our troops and to bring the hostilities which were under way when he took office to an end in a way that will contribute to a durable peace."

Earlier in the letter, Mr. Abshire stated that "if the North Vietnamese were to conquer all of Laos they could divert thousands of their forces now engaged in north Laos to the war against South Vietnam and greatly enhance their position in those areas of Laos bordering on South Vietnam from which they launch attacks on United States and allied forces."